

Strengthening General Practice in New Zealand

A strong, accessible, and financially sustainable general practice sector is the cornerstone of a high-performing health system.

When general practice works well, patients receive timely care, hospitals face less pressure, and public funding is used more efficiently.

This policy agenda sets out practical, evidence-based actions that political parties can adopt ahead of the November 2026 election.

It aligns with and supports the Government's five national health priorities: Access, Timeliness, Quality, Workforce, and Infrastructure.

1. Invest in Frontline General Practice

- Commit to a minimum cumulative 30 percent increase in general practice funding over three years to help practices restore financial sustainability.
- Increase investment in primary care from 6% of Vote Health toward international benchmarks WHO/OECD 14% of total health expenditure.
- Introduce an improved independent cost-pressure adjustment mechanism to prevent real-term erosion of practice income.
- Separate the funder from the provider to ensure impartial allocation of health budget across the sector.
- Establish a multi-year funding pathway that provides certainty and supports long-term planning and investment.

2. Support Continuity of Care and Face-to-Face Services

- Recognise continuity of care as a core quality measure, linked to improved outcomes and reduced hospitalisations.
- Incentivise models that enable patients to see the same GP over time.
- Maintain face-to-face consultations as the foundation of care, with telehealth as a complementary tool.
- End preferential funding for telehealth by ensuring in-person general practice is equally funded to provide urgent and casual care.

3. Reduce Centralised Bureaucracy and Improve Funding Transparency

- Require full transparency of funding flows from government to frontline services.
- Fund and enable general practices to deliver services wherever possible, reducing unnecessary intermediaries.

4. Support the Owner-Operator GP Model

- Support independent ownership by:
 - Preventing policies that favour corporate consolidation.

- Ensuring funding models remain viable for all practices.

5. Ensure General Practice Has a Strong Voice in Policy

- Require consultation with general practice representatives on all major funding and service design changes in both health and injury care.
- Ensure evidence-based policy decisions reflect both clinical realities and business sustainability.

6. Build a Sustainable General Practice Workforce

- Introduce incentives for GPs and nurses to enter and remain in general practice, including ownership.
- Ensure funding enables pay and conditions aligned with hospital roles to improve recruitment and retention.
- Fund and support the costs of recruitment and retention of overseas-based clinicians.
- Offer low-interest capital or grants for independent practitioners to buy into general practices

7. Protect Access to affordable general practice care

- Ensure funding keeps pace with costs so practices are not forced to increase patient fees.
- Ensure funding is based on patient need, not practice need.

8. Strengthen Rural and After-Hours Care

- Increase rural funding to reflect the true cost of rural care including sustainable after-hours services.
- Support locum availability, housing assistance, and travel support for rural clinicians.
- Invest in infrastructure and digital connectivity to support rural service delivery.

Conclusion

A well-funded and empowered general practice sector delivers better outcomes for patients, reduces pressure on hospitals, and ensures the long-term sustainability of New Zealand's health system.

This is not just a sector issue—it is a system-wide priority.

Investing in general practice is the most effective way to improve health outcomes while controlling costs.